

Los Angeles Public Library
630 West Fifth St.
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-1937

HABS
CAL;
19-LOSAN,
65-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY

HABS No. CA-1937

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Location: 630 W. 5th Street, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.

Present Owner: Board of Library Commissioners
City of Los Angeles, 630 W. 5th Street, Los Angeles, California.

Present Occupant: Los Angeles Central Library

Present Use: Library

Significance: Designed by noted architect Bertram G. Goodhue, in 1924, the Los Angeles Public Library shows influences from the beaux-arts, the art deco idiom of the time, and of the California missions. Along with Goodhue's Nebraska State Capitol of the same period, the building takes design elements from various periods, but is overall an extremely original, effective composition. Arts were integrated into the design in the form of sculpture, tile and terra-cotta work, and mosaics.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1925.
2. Architect: Bertram G. Goodhue.
Association architect: Carlton M. Winslow, Sr.
3. Original and subsequent owners: There has only been one owner, the City of Los Angeles. Records of the deed are in the Hall of Records and Assessor's Office, Civic Center, Los Angeles. Book 5151, p. 25. The building is on Block 103, Parcel 900, Dan Morris Tract, Lots 16-20, and Lot 3 of the Bellvue Terrace Tract.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Architectural Iron Works, Inc. of Los Angeles; Oro Grande Lime and Stone Co.; Gladding-McBean Co.; Southern California Hardwood and Manufacturing Co.; California Stucco Products Co.; California Cut Stone and Marble Co.; Earle Hardware Manufacturing Co.
5. Original plans and construction: three stories, two basements; reinforced concrete frame, cement plaster exterior, tower faced with Spanish tile. Interior walls are plaster; floors are tile or marble.

6. Alterations and additions: No major changes.

Prepared by: Esther McCoy
July 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Los Angeles Public Library, was designed by Bertram Goodhue (1924) with Carlton M. Winslow, Sr. as Supervising architect. The building is particularly noted for its pleasant park setting, an oasis in the midst of the central city's high rise development. It rises from this park to its pyramidal capped central tower which is finished with shimmering mosaic suns on blue backgrounds. Within, the severe forms of the domed rotunda are relieved by the large painted murals and stencil work. The building abounds in stylized Egyptian sculpture and wall paintings.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good physical condition. The future of the building is uncertain at the present (1969) as it not longer function properly nor does it adequately serve the library's space needs.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main mass of the building is 238'-11" from east to west and 171'-7-1/2" from north to south. The small bulk at the SE corner changes the overall dimensions on the east side to 196'-7-1/2" and on the south side to 319'-8". From the sidewalk to the top of the tower the height is 188'.

There are three main levels to the building plus 2 basements and the levels of the tower. The main part of the building is rectangular in plan, but there is a projection in the SE corner. The three story mass has a tower rising from the center which is capped by a pyramidal roof.

2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.
3. Wall construction: The walls are of 12" thick reinforced concrete. The exterior surface is finished in a hard, smooth buff toned stucco with Bedford limestone trim.

4. Structural system, framing: There are reinforced concrete columns supporting reinforced concrete girders; a simple post and lintel system. The arches of the rotunda are of reinforced concrete and have a span of 42'. They spring off 4 concrete piers, each measuring 8'-6" square.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: A stepped terrace arrangement (3 levels) is located on the south side and stairs mark the transition from Hope Street to the entrance level of the building. This terrace extends the full length of the building and is landscaped with various types of plants.

There is a terrace garden at the NE corner of the building with walks crossing it diagonally and encircling it. The garden quadrants are grassed.

A stepped terrace walk extends from Flower Street on the west to the western entrance (this entrance is no longer used). This access walk has a series of pools on its axis.

6. Chimneys: None visible.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All exterior doorways have arched openings. The doors on the north and south are metal (3 panels in vertical composition) within a metal frame and have a metal spandrel panel over. The entrance door on the west is wood (6 panels high and 2 wide on each door leaf) with a wood paneled spandrel over. All doorways have two leaves.
 - b. Windows: All windows are metal sash in metal frames. The standard unit is 3 lights high by two wide. All windows are multiples of that unit and are either casement, hopper, or fixed dash. The large windows on the second floor contain 9 of these basic units (3 high by 3 wide).
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The main portion of the roof is flat and covered with composition material. Where the lower portions of the building do not rise to the full three-story height, the surfaces are covered with 8" x 8" tiles. The tower cap is covered with mosaics having a golden sun on a blue background and with other details in green and white. There are three and four foot parapets on all roof levels.

- b. Tower structure: A great central tower rises from the roof to a height of 188' from the sidewalk on the Hope Street side. The third floor rooms are pulled away from the tower (providing for light to enter the rotunda) which gives the impression (when viewed from the air) that the building is built around the tower.
9. Exterior decorative features: The neutral tone of the stucco surfaces is relieved by the highly colored glazed tile of the pyramidal upper portion of the towers, by the pools and fountains, and by the sculptured bronze work of the doorways.

The carved and sculptured stonework has subject matter which expresses the purposes and ideals of a library. The parapet figures of literary personages are located above the main entrance and at several other locations along the top of the building. In addition, there are inscriptions and the names of various literary personages along the facades.

The tower is terminated in a finial in the form of a hand entwined with the serpent of knowledge holding aloft a golden torch.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. The first floor plan of the quadrangular building is intersected on the two axes by corridors leading to the central lobby. The corridor from the lobby to the west entrance is no longer open to the public. The corridor to the east gives access to the children's department and the school teachers' department. A smaller lobby is located just south of the central lobby and serves the elevators on the east and a stairway on the west. At the north end of the plan is a stairway with symmetrically disposed stairways to the second floor.
- b. The second floor is basically the same as the first in the disposition of elements. This is the main floor of the library. The Rotunda (the center of library activities and the chief structural and decorative feature of the building) is located above the central lobby of the first floor. The reading rooms are located on the perimeter of the plan so that each has an exterior exposure. On the south side is the History room and the rotunda are the four divisions of general bookstacks, which rise 7 tiers into the tower.

- c. The third floor is devoted to executive functions with library offices and work rooms. This level is not open to the public. The rotunda passes through this level without any physical or visual contact between the levels. The result is a somewhat different planning arrangement. The corridor encircles the rotunda mass, being double-loaded on the east and west and single-loaded on the north and south sides. The assembly room is located on the north side and the catalogue department extends across the west side. The remainder of the floor is taken up by lesser offices. There are two basements, inaccessible for observation.

Early statistics reveal that the building originally had 260,000 square feet (4,3000,000 cubic feet) with 15 public reading rooms having 1200 reading room seats. There were study, club, and lecture rooms with over 500 seats. The book capacity in 1927 was 1,125,000 volumes.

2. Stairways: Stairways are situated at the north end of the building and in the south lobby (just off the central lobby). Lesser stairways are found in the stack and storage areas. The north stairways are symmetrically disposed about the entrance door. Twenty-seven risers in each stair connect to the second level. They begin at the sides and join at the center (over the door) at the second floor. The risers measure 6-2/3". The risers, treads, and platforms are marble, the handrails are wood, and the brackets are bronze.

The central stairway has 28 6-3/7" risers; the treads are of slate, the handrails and balusters are of wrought iron. The service stairs in the stacks, etc., are wrought iron with slate treads.

3. Flooring: On the first floor the corridors are of slate tile, the public reading rooms of linoleum, and service areas of cement. On the second floor, the central rotunda and corridors have marble floors, while the reading rooms have linoleum.

The third floor corridors are cement slate tile. The offices have linoleum surfaces.

4. Walls and ceilings: The interior walls in the main rooms are left as stripped from the concrete forms. Some walls, especially the partitions, are of plaster over tile or the structural concrete. The hall walls have rectangular panels recessed into their surfaces.

The rotunda walls are of concrete with painted stencil work and murals. Murals are also an important part of the history reading room finish. The ceilings are firmed down and plastered. In some spaces the girders are exposed and painted. In other spaces acoustical tile is used. The rotunda dome and the reading room beams have painted stencil work.

5. Doorways and doors: All interior doors are of wood set in wooden frames. The doors all have one large panel recess.
6. Decorative features, trim: The central domed rotunda owes its full decorative impact to the large murals on the walls and the mosaic-like stencil work on the dome itself. The murals were painted by Dean Cornwell (work completed in 1932) and contain 300 figures depicting four great eras - the beginnings of arts and industries, and the conquering of the elements of California. The subjects are the Discovery Era (north wall), the Mission Building Era (east wall), the Americanization Era (south wall), and the Founding of Los Angeles in 1781 (west wall). Art, industry, commerce, education, earth, air, water, and fire are depicted on the sides of the recesses of the rotunda.

The history Reading Room has large murals (originally in the south corridor on the first floor) depicting the history of California. These paintings are called the Albert Herter Murals after the artist. The subjects are: 1) the Raising of the Flag at Monterey (east wall); 2) Finding of Gold in '49 (east wall); 3) the Landing of Cabrillo at Catalina Island (west wall); 4) the Building of a Mission (north wall); 5) the Fiesta at a Mission (north wall). In addition, smaller murals depict Jose Gaspar de Portola (north wall), Juan Bautista de Anza (north wall) and Relief Ship at San Diego (south wall). The ceiling decorations are by Julian Garnsey and were painted directly on the concrete beams (his associate was Mr. Parsons). The sculptural work at the north end of the second floor is by Lee Lawrie, of New York. The Statue of Civilization symbolizes all the library represents (Dr. H. B. Alexander, of the University of Nebraska, did the scholarly compiling of the inscription and symbolism). The statue is of Italian marble with metal draperies and carved panel. In the right hand the figure holds a book with passages written in four languages. In her left hand is a torch, tipped with flame, resting on a turtle. On the crown is a miniature representation of the library. In the panel down the front of her garb are symbols of ancient and modern civilizations.

The library is outfitted with wooden book shelves in the reading rooms, as well as other wooden library furniture such as the card catalogues, information and service desks. The tables in the reading rooms originally and tall lamp fixtures as seen in old photographs. Wrought iron grilles with gates were placed over openings into the main reading rooms.

7. Hardware: Standard door hardware used throughout the building.
8. Mechanical equipment: Not investigated for this report.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The site is 300' x 745' (the longer dimension running east to west). The building is located in the center of this park-like site which occupies a half block area. The building takes up the full width of the site but there are pleasant parks to the east and west. The lot acts as the termination of Hope Street on the south. The main entry is on that side. The site slopes slightly from the west to the east.

The former main entrance was located on the west (Flower Street), was approached by paths on each side of 3 long tile pools, and was flanked by Italian cypresses.

The park had planting mostly of "classical character" (laurel, acanthus, olive, palm, and cypress). The park setting is still intact, though its immediate future is uncertain at this time (1969).

2. Outbuildings: The library garage units are located at the NW corner of the building. Large blank walls mask out the views of the vehicles in the garage yard.

Prepared by: Robert C. Giebner
Project Supervisor,
HABS Southern California
Project II
August, 1969

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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Good Housekeeping, New York, Jan., Feb., Mar., 1932

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2/20/27, pt. V, p. 8

Los Angeles Herald Examiner, 10/15/1966

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in co-operation with the Southern California Co-ordinating Committee for Historic Preservation. This is the HABS-Southern California Project II. The project was undertaken in 1969.

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